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Winchester freshmen make new PALs during orientation tours at high school

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

August 29, 2024 . 6:00 AM — 3 min read

Seniors Tasnim Abdurrob, left, Julien He and Aden Huang speak to a group of incoming freshmen students at WHS during orientation tours on Aug. 28. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

If you drove by Winchester High School this week, you might have wondered what was up with all the kids coming and going from the building, especially the ones with the yellow smiley-faced shirts.

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Sure, it's only a week before school officially starts on Sept. 5, but it didn't stop a few hundred kids from participating in tours of the high school, both giving them and taking them.

WHS Principal Dennis Mahoney said about 100 students from Peer Alliance Leaders (PAL) volunteered to be on campus Aug. 28 to show the new kids around, 50 in the morning and 50 in the afternoon.

PAL volunteers give a group of incoming freshmen a tour around WHS, answering any questions they might have before school officially opens Sept. 5. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

"I took a tour as a freshman and I thought it was very helpful and I wanted to do it for someone else," said PAL volunteer and incoming senior Tasnim Abdurrob, of why she was on hand. "McCall [Middle School] is so different and I thought it would help kids feel less stressed out."

Fellow senior Aden Huang said he'd also taken the tour as a freshman.

"It helps to have a person you know on the first day of school," he said. "You can be a friend."

Julien He, also an incoming senior, said his brother is a freshma

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and unlike Abdurrob and Huang who have done the tours for a few years

now, this was his first time volunteering.

“My brother is a freshman so I know a lot of these kids,” he said. “I wanted to help them start in a good way. It’s also a good way to connect, especially if you see them during the school year.”

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Freshman wandered WHS Wednesday, whether in groups with PAL tours, in pairs or even solo. Alfredo Solar de la Fuente said he wasn’t sure what drew him to the school except maybe to get a feel of the building.

“I went to orientation, but I wanted to come to the tour so I could follow my schedule,” he said, looking around a corridor in B building.

When asked if he was excited about starting high school, he shrugged.

“A little bit,” he said.

Fellow incoming freshmen Michael Torres and Euan Gwee were also unsure about opening day. Gwee said it was mixed feelings.

“Half and half,” he said about whether or not he was excited. “I’m excited to be here, but you know, it’s school.”

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PAL volunteers and incoming WHS seniors Julien He, left, Aden Huang and Tasnim Abdurrob, say they want to help the Class of 2028 get a good start to their first year of high school. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

As they waited in the teeming cafeteria, both Torres and Gwee agreed it was important to come take the PAL tour.

“I don’t want to be here on the first day with no idea where I’m going,” Torres said. “I want to have a good start.”

Gwee agreed.

“I don’t want to get lost,” he said. “I wanted to have a general sense and overall understanding of the school.”

Mahoney said giving freshmen support, whether via PAL or other programs, has paid off. He said throughout the year, freshmen an students starting out in Winchester, have the opportunity to prov

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feedback about what works and if they need other resources to settle in at the school.

Upon hearing how enthusiastically the PAL mentors spoke about the school, he laughed.

“It’s par for the course around here,” he said. “Most of our students enjoy the high school process. They are engaged and they volunteer and attend to the school in one form or another.”

As the new school year draws nearer, Mahoney added WHS is ready for opening day.

“Oh, yes, we’re ready,” he said. “We were ready last week! Now it’s just a matter of crossing the t’s and dotting the i’s.”

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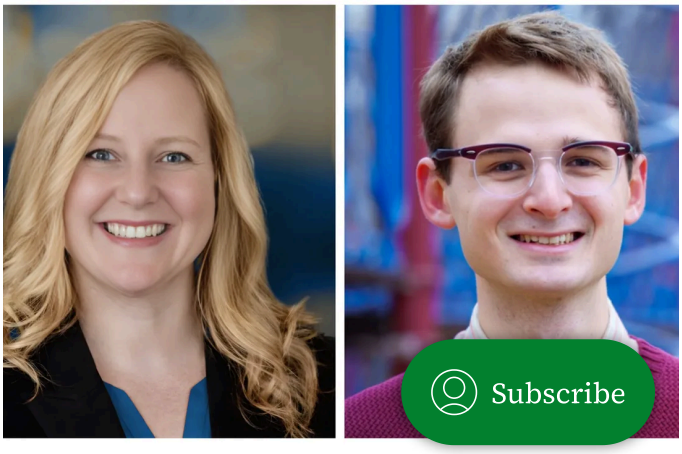

NEWS

Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

March 4, 2026

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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